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Authentic Assessment in Higher Education: Combining professional and academic standards into a coherent assessment framework



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The Purposes of Education

- Qualification: knowledge and certification
- Socialisation: family, citizenship, employability
- Subjectification: developing as a unique human being

Gert Biesta (2011) Good Education in an Age of Measurement

Neoliberal policy frameworks position higher education as a constrained form of 'oven-ready' employability and students as individual entrepreneurs...



Criteria and 'standards' in assessment theory



- **Assessment criteria**

The term 'criteria' is used to refer to a 'property, quality, characteristic or attribute of a student response'

- **Grade descriptor**

Whereas the term 'standard' refers to the level of quality
(Sadler, 1987)

- **Analytic grading** - separate qualitative judgments against criteria
- **Holistic grading** - building up a complex mental response to student work or performance

(Sadler 2009)

Authentic Assessment?



- **Realism**
Real world: workplace performance, simulation, relevance beyond the taught programme, practical
- **Cognitive challenge**
Contextualised problem-solving: including metacognition
- **Evaluative judgment**
Becoming a **:** through formative assessment against criteria and developing capacity for self-assessment

Villarroel, V., Bloxham, S., Bruna, D., Bruna, C. & Herrera-Seda, C. (2018) Authentic assessment: creating a blueprint for course design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43(5): 840-854.

Authentic Assessment?

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To what extent are your assessments 'authentic'?

Do you have a workplace learning module, and how is it assessed?

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Cognitive Challenge



Knowledge Dimension	The Cognitive Process Dimension					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Create
Factual						
Conceptual						
Procedural						
Metacognitive						

(Developed from Bloom’s Taxonomy: Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001;
Anderson 2003: 29; Bloxham & Boyd 2007)

Evaluative Judgment

Judging quality in the company of experts and peers,
developing as a connoisseur...

Grading exemplar student work against assessment criteria
and debating its strengths and possible strategies for
improvement...



Tai, J., Ajjawi, R., Boud, D. *et al.* Developing evaluative judgement: enabling students to make decisions about the quality of work. *High Educ* **76**, 467–481 (2018). Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-017-0220-3>

Sources of Data

Documents

Teachers' Standards for England and guidance

Programme Specification document

Academic grade descriptor & Workplace learning grade descriptor

Participants

Semi-structured interviews with 3 tutors on the programme

Two focus groups of 5 student teachers in year 2 of the programme

Schedule: What are the characteristics of an effective teacher? Here are the Teachers' Standards, is anything missing from them? How do the Teachers' Standards influence the programme, including assessment?



What is the position of 'professional standards' within authentic assessment on the programme?

Change in practice requires symbolic change

- language, power, history, social practice...

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on three levels:

The text: linguistic features of the text

Discursive practice: processes of production and consumption of the text plus intertextuality and interdiscursivity...

Social Practice: the contextual circumstances and constitutive effects of discourse

(Fairclough 1989; 1992; van Dijk 1993)



What is the position of 'professional standards' within authentic assessment on the programme?



Hybrid Thematic Analysis (TA) is bottom-up and top-down:

Inductive reasoning: open coding and generate themes

Deductive reasoning: coding with themes from the theoretical framework

Synthesis: relations between the different themes

(Braun & Clarke 2006; 2019; Fereday et al. 2006)

Case Study: Initial Teacher Education Degree

- Three year undergraduate programme 'Primary Education'
- Operates within a university-schools partnership
- Students gain 'Qualified Teacher Status' by successful completion of a final 6 week work placement in a school
- Taught modules: design influenced by the Teachers' Standards and a range of arguably 'authentic' assessments including projects and portfolios
- School placements: classroom 'enactment and evaluation' with mentor teacher and visiting tutor providing formative and summative 'authentic' assessment by observation and portfolio



Teachers' Standards in England

- Eight 'standards' mainly focused on knowledge and technical aspects of teaching
 - Smaller secondary section on professional 'conduct'
1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
 2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
 3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge
 4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons
 5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils
 6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
 7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment
 8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities



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What are the key characteristics of an effective teacher?

What do you feel is missing from the teachers' standards in England?

CDA of Teachers' Standards Text... 1

- The Teachers' Standards do not foreground a critical perspective, for example on social justice through education, or professional values and professional judgment.
- The Teachers' Standards represent 'policy-makers' perceptions of school-based discourse – they do not include 'ways of knowing' and exclude terms such as 'evidence-based' or 'research-informed'.
- The teacher is assumed to be a technician delivering largely uncontested 'good practice' and a prescribed curriculum rather than a professional with 'research literacy' involved in professional inquiry, curriculum development and judgments.



CDA of Teachers' Standards Text... 2

- The Teachers' Standards present the 8 standards as assessment criteria, as threshold minimum for all teachers.
- For experienced teachers, the 'standard' or grade descriptor is delegated to headteachers.

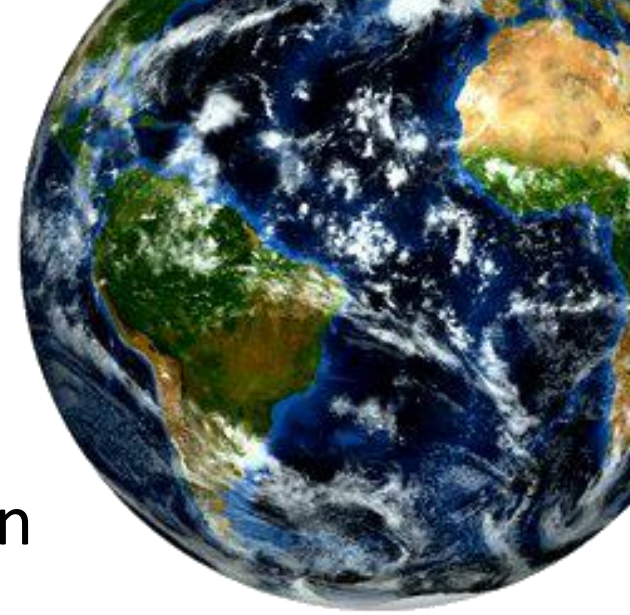
'Headteachers and others should use the Teachers' Standards to improve standards of teaching in their schools, by setting minimum expectations and assessing performance against them'

- A 'professional grade descriptor' based on national guidance is used to grade student teachers on work placements – it focuses on demonstration of the Teachers' Standards – consistency and level of autonomy, no more than that.



CDA of the ITE programme specification

- Claims to be 'focused on employability' and 'mapped against current standards'.
- Claims an element of lifelong learning, but does not explain how the programme develops capacity for this.
- However, a sequence of modules is focused on investigating learning and teaching, implying 'ways of knowing'.
- Aims, content and assessment tasks include reference to research and theoretical perspectives.
- An academic grade descriptor seems to support 'cognitive challenge' and 'evaluative judgment'.

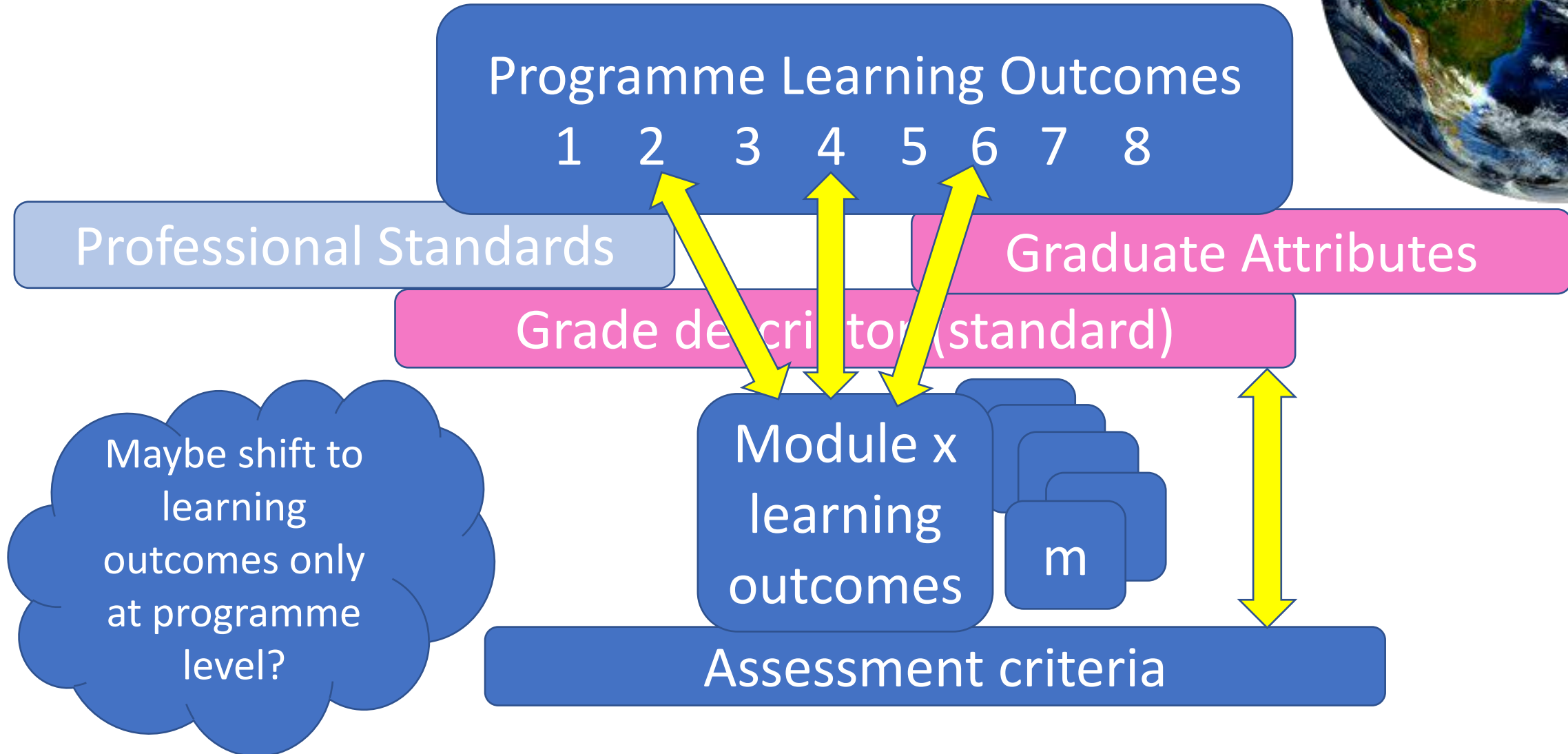


Hybrid TA of interview and focus group data

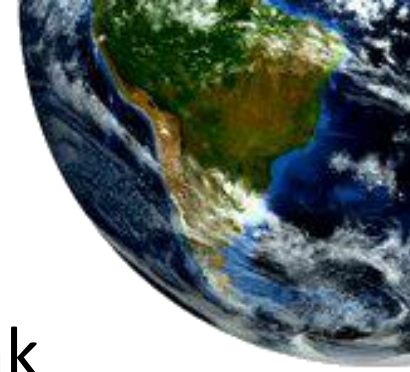
- Uncritical acceptance of the Teachers' Standards.
- Centrality of the Teachers' Standards.
- Integration through intertextuality but weak interdiscursivity.
- A strong discursive boundary between university and schools.
- Authentic assessment dominated by the 'realism' dimension.



(Dis)integration through programme design



Findings and implications 1



- The boundary-crossing impact of the Teachers' Standards is weak because the text is dominated by policy-makers' perceptions of school-based discourse. **Mediate the 'professional standards' through collaborative negotiation across the university-employer partnership to develop their interdiscursivity.**
- Integration of Teachers' Standards is weak and unbalanced – they are diluted at programme and especially at module levels of design. **Strengthen integration through development of programme learning outcomes by the partnership, and even consider learning outcomes *only* at programme level?**

Findings and implications 2

- Professional standards with a boundary-crossing discourse should be integrated. **But as a contested and dynamic element of authentic assessment across university-employer partnerships.**
- Even in tightly regulated professional fields, academics must go beyond compliance with government policy frameworks. **They should educate students to be agential, critical, lifelong learners, global citizens, and unique human-beings, not merely to be ‘oven-ready’ workers.**



The end of the age of measurement?

**A more demanding
definition of employability?**

**Education for global
citizenship?**

**Teachers and nurses as
highly valued graduate key
workers?**

Neoliberal
Education
Policy
1980-2020
R.I.P.



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